



POWER TO REACH YOUR FULL POTENTIAL

HEBREWS 13:20-21

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SERMON MANUSCRIPT

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Christian worship services often end with a benediction. The word “BENEDICTION” is derived from a Latin term that means “a blessing.” That’s what a benediction is. Pastors have the wonderful privilege of prayerfully announcing divine blessings on the assembled congregation of the people of God as they depart the place of worship. The benediction is typically announced by simply quoting from a statement of blessing from the word of God. It is my custom to announce the benediction by using the words of Numbers 6:24-26, where the Lord commands Moses to instruct Aaron and his sons, the priests, to bless the people with these words: *“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lit up his countenance upon you and give you peace.”*

But there are many other passages of scripture that make great benedictions. Like 2 Corinthians 13:14: *“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”* Or Ephesians 3:20-21: *“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”* Or Jude 24-25: *“Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever.”*

Hebrews 13:20-21 is another wonderful passage that is often used to announce the blessings of God on the people of God from the word of God. Without a doubt, many pastors will dismiss their people from worship today by lifting their hands over them and declaring, *“Now may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”* This deep, rich, full benediction proclaims there is divine power in Christ to reach your full potential. Contrary to popular belief, God does not help those who help themselves. But God does help those who trust in Jesus Christ.

It is time to retire your refrigerator. It has served you faithfully for years. But it is time for a new one. Since this new refrigerator will have to serve

you for years to come, you buy the top of the line, with all the bells and whistles. It can do everything but turn out the lights, take out the trash, and walk the dog. You are so excited when it arrives that you go to the grocery store to stock it with food. But when you wake up the next morning and go to your new refrigerator, your food has spoiled and your frozen goods have all melted. It’s not working. So you call up customer support. The person on the other end listens patiently and tries to diagnose the problem. Nothing works. Finally, he gives one more set of instructions. Open the refrigerator and see if the light comes on. You do. It doesn’t. Put your ear up to it and see if you can hear the motor humming. You do. You can’t. Check behind the refrigerator and see if it is plugged up. You do. It isn’t. Embarrassed, you tell the worker that after all the money you spent on the refrigerator, it ought to work anyhow!

This is how many people live. There is potential but there is not power. G.K. CHESTERTON said it well: “Whatever else is said of man, this much is clear: He is not what he is capable of being.” But the good news is that the power to reach your full potential is available to those who trust in Jesus Christ. This great benediction in Hebrews 13:20-21 declares that God has done great things for us through Jesus Christ and God will do great things for us through Jesus Christ.

I. GOD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR US THROUGH JESUS CHRIST.

This benediction begins with words of invocation. Verse 21 says, “Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant.” This verse gives three foundational reasons why you can trust God to do for you what you cannot do for yourself.

A. GOD IS THE GOD OF PEACE.

The Epistle of Hebrews was written to at-risk Jewish Christians. Severe persecution has tempted some of these believers to forsake their faith in Christ and to return to the practice of Judaism. The anonymous author of Hebrews writes to say to this suffering church that what you have in Christ is infinitely better than what you had in the old covenant. When you get to this closing benediction, the point has been sufficiently made. And the writer ends the letter words of encouragement in this benediction. And this first thing he says to encourage his readers is that God is the God of peace. What is peace? We often think of peace in terms of what it is not. We define peace

as the absence of war, animosity, and hostility. But true peace is more than the absence of negative realities. No one is fighting at a cemetery. But I would not advise you to go there looking for peace. In scripture, peace is positive reality. In the Old Testament, the typical greeting was “SHA-LOM” – Peace be with you. This was more than a wish that you do not get into any fights. It expressed a desire for health, wholeness, completeness, wellbeing, and prosperity in your life. Peace is to the soul what health is to the body.

Where does true peace come from? Verse 20 says that God is “the God of peace.” Wherever God is, there is peace. And wherever peace is, there is God. God is the author and source and center and giver of peace. Isaiah 26:3 says, *“You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.”* First, those who trust in Jesus Christ are beneficiaries of PEACE WITH GOD. Romans 5:1 says, *“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Sin makes us enemies of God. Sin is enmity against God. Sin is willful rebellion against the holy government of God. But we have peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Likewise, those who trust in God are beneficiaries of THE PEACE OF GOD. Philippians 4:6-7 says, *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”* JOHN BLANCHARD said it well: “The peace of God means being grateful for his past mercies, conscious of his present mercies, and certain of his future mercies.”

B. GOD RAISED THE LORD JESUS FROM THE DEAD.

The theme of the Epistle of Hebrews is the superiority of the Lord Jesus Christ and the new covenant with God established by the blood of his cross. The writer emphasizes this point by focusing on the exaltation of Christ as our Great High Priest and his present intercessory ministry on our behalf. Interestingly, verse 20 is the only direct reference

to the resurrection of Christ from the dead in the book of Hebrews. The writer simply assumes the resurrection of Christ throughout this letter. But now he boldly declares it in this benediction that intends to communicate to those who struggle with their faith in Christ that God can do for you what you cannot do for yourself. The verse says that God *“brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus.”* In the Gospels, the fact and truth of the resurrection is stated by declaring that Jesus rose from the dead. But in the Epistles, the significance, meaning, and significance of the resurrection is stated by declared that God raised Jesus from the dead. This was the message Peter declared on the day of Pentecost. In Acts 2:24 Peter says, *“God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.”*

God brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus. And the fact that God raised Jesus from the dead means you can trust that God is able to bring to life whatever may be dead in your spiritual life. Romans 8:11 says, *“If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”* The resurrection of Christ is not just a historical fact. It is an ongoing reality for those who trust in him. A.W. Tozer said it well: “The resurrection morning was only the beginning of a great, grand and vast outreach that has never ended and will not end until the Lord Jesus Christ comes back again.” The God who raised Jesus from the dead is able to clear your past, conquer your problems, and change your personality.

Note that after this reference to the resurrection, the writer attributes a unique title to the Lord Jesus: “the great shepherd of the sheep.” This statement about the Lord Jesus also makes a statement about us. We are just sheep. This is not a flattering designation. Sheep are stupid, helpless, and rebellious animals. It has been well said that the existence of sheep is evidence against the theory of evolution. Sheep only survive because of the shepherd. But it has to be a good shepherd, not just a hireling who runs when the predators attack. Thank God we have a good shepherd in the Lord Jesus. John 10:11 says, *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”* Jesus is the good shepherd who died for us. But he is also the great shepherd who lives for us. In fact, 1 Peter 5:4 says he is the

chief shepherd who is coming who is coming back for us. This is why we sing, “*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.*” The little boy was assigned Psalm 23:1 to recite for the Sunday school program. But when he could not remember the whole verse. So he announced, “The Lord is my shepherd, and that’s all I know.” This is how you ought to respond to the dangers, toils, and snares of life.

C. GOD ESTABLISHED AN ETERNAL COVENANT WITH US THROUGH THE BLOOD OF CHRIST.

This clause, “by the blood of the eternal covenant,” points back to the previous clause and forward to the succeeding clause. On one hand, this reference to the blood of the eternal covenant is connected to the previous statement about God bringing up the Lord Jesus from the dead. Chronologically, the crucifixion comes before the resurrection. Good Friday comes before Easter. But theologically, there is a real sense in which the resurrection comes before the crucifixion. In other words, without Easter Sunday morning, Good Friday would be bad Friday. The proof that what happened on the cross was a good thing is the fact that God raised Jesus from the dead. The resurrection was God’s stamp of approval on the resurrection. So there is a sense in which God brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus by the blood of the eternal covenant. On the other hand, this reference to the blood of the eternal covenant is connected to opening statement of verse 21 that says God will “*equip you with everything good that you may do his will.*” The only way you can reach your full potential is by the blood of the eternal covenant. This clause declares that we are saved and secured by the blood of the eternal covenant.

WE ARE SAVED BY THE BLOOD OF THE ETERNAL COVENANT. A covenant is an agreement or contract. The Bible uses the term to describe the terms by which sinful humans may relate to a holy God. In the Old Testament, God related to his people through a covenant of obedience. If the people obeyed God, he would bless them. If they disobeyed,

God would curse them. This is why you find the Children of Israel on a nonstop rollercoaster from prosperity to disaster in the Old Testament. But there is a new covenant established through the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a covenant of grace. Those who are part of the new covenant reside under the unending favor of God that because of what God has done for us, not what we do or do not do. In the Old Testament, the high priest would go into the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement with a bull and two goats. He would sacrifice a bull for his own sins, to consecrate himself in the presence of God. Then he would then lay his hands on one of the goats, confess the sins of the people, and sacrifice the goat. The blood of the innocent goat would make atonement for the sins of the people. Then he would take the other goat – called the “scapegoat” and lead it into the wilderness, never to be seen again. This is just a picture of what Christ did for us. On Good Friday, he became our sacrificial goat who atones for our sins with his blood. On Easter, he became our scapegoat who takes our sins away.

WE ARE SECURE BECAUSE OF THE BLOOD OF THE ETERNAL COVENANT. The sacrificial system of the Old Testament was effective but incomplete. When the High Priest would go into the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement an actual atonement took place. But a year later, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would have to go through the process all over again. But this is not the case with the new covenant. Nothing can cancel, nullify, or supercede the covenant we have with God through the blood of Christ. This is why verse 20 calls it “*the blood of the eternal covenant.*” The word eternal means eternal. The blood of Jesus establishes a new covenant with God that lasts forever. Can you lose your salvation? Romans 8:31-34 answers: “*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.*”

II. GOD WILL DO GREAT THINGS FOR US THROUGH JESUS CHRIST.

Verse 20 states the subject of this benediction: *“Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant.”* This verse looks back with assurance that God has done great things for us through Jesus Christ. Verse 21 states the predicate of this benediction. May God *“equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”* This verse looks forward with assurance that God will do great things for us through Jesus Christ. You can trust God to provide the equipment and enablement you need in order to reach your full potential in Christ.

A. PRAY FOR DIVINE EQUIPMENT.

In verse 18-19, the anonymous author of Hebrews asks his readers to pray for him. Now, in verses 20-21, he prays for them. And he makes one all-consuming prayer request on their behalf: that God may *“equip you with everything good that you may do his will.”* This verb “equip” is the key term of the text. The KJV translates it “perfect” The NKJV translates it “complete.” But the ESV and others probably get it best by rendering it “equip.” The Greek term was used of soldiers being equipped with weapons and other reasons needed for battle. It was used sailors loading their ships with goods before they set sail. It was used of doctors setting a broken bone to that it may heal. And it was used of fishermen mending their nets. The pictures all describe the process of preparing, shaping, adjusting, mending, or restoring something for use. It is to make something fit or ready or capable of use. In fact, the pictures of a doctor setting a bone or a fisherman mending his nets envisions restoring something that is broken in order to use it again. This is what the writer prays will take place in the lives of those who trust in Christ. May God equip you. May God make you fit and ready and capable. May God put your broken pieces back together so that become useful again.

With what does God equip us? Verse 21 says God can *“equip you with everything good.”* James 1:17 says, *“Every good and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”* God only gives good gifts. Anything that is not good by nature or good for the purpose of perfecting you is not from God. God is good all the time. But the emphasis of the phrase is not merely on the fact that God gives good things. It is the comprehensiveness of the good things God provides. God will equip you with everything God – be it love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control or any other good thing you may need to resist temptation, live obediently, and reach your full potential in Christ.

Why does God equip us with every good thing? Verse 21 prays that God may *“equip you with everything good to do his will.”* The will of God is God’s plan and purpose for your life. And it is always good. Jeremiah 29:11 says, *“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”* Many struggle to know the details of God’s will for their lives. But the emphasis here is doing his will, not knowing his will. The writer seems to assume that if you are willing to do the will of God, he will make his will known to you. So the writer does not try to tell us how to find God’s will, as if it was lost. Rather, he tells us that your sincere desire to do God’s will is not enough. You need the grace and strength and wisdom to do his will. The will of God will never lead you where the grace of God cannot keep you. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”* If you follow God’s will for your life, wherever it leads, you can live with the confidence that when you find yourself in river you cannot cross God will either build a bridge, sent a boat, or teach you to swim. God will equip you with everything good to do his will.

HAVE YOU RIVERS THAT SEEM UNCROSSABLE?
 HAVE YOU MOUNTAINS YOU CANNOT TUNNEL THROUGH?
 GOD SPECIALIZES IN THINGS IMPOSSIBLE.
 AND HE CAN DO WHAT NO OTHER POWER CAN DO.

B. PRAY FOR DIVINE ENABLEMENT.

How does God equip you with everything good that you may do his will? Verse 21 answers by “*working in us that which is pleasing in his sight.*” Notice the progression of the text. It says that God will equip you with everything good to do his will. Then it says that God himself will be working in you that which is pleasing in his sight. So in a real sense God does not equip you with good things as much as he equip you with himself. And from within, God himself provides everything good to do his will. Philippians 2:12 exhorts believers to live up to their full potential in Christ: “*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*” Be clear. The verse does not exhort us to work for our salvation. It exhorts us to work out our salvation. But that may seem just as impossible as working for your salvation. How are we to work out our salvation? Philippians 2:13 answers: “*for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*” You do not have to depend on a human mediator or patron saint or guardian angel to access the help of God. The one who trusts in Christ can be certain that God himself is at work in you. You ought to rehearse Philippians 2:13 as you start your day. Ask, who can I count to be with me today? “It is God.” Where is he? “In you.” What is he doing? “Working.” Why is he working in me? “To will and to work for his good pleasure?”

How should you respond to the fact that God will equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight?

DEPEND ON THE LORD JESUS FOR ACCESS TO GOD.

Verse 21 says that we have access to divine equipment and enablement through Jesus Christ.” The only way you can access this power to reach your full potential is through Jesus Christ. Colossians 1:15-17 says, “*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him*

all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” Think about that last line. Christ is the one that holds all things together. This is true of the world around us. And it is true of your private world. Things may be bad in your life right now. But know that things would be a lot worse if the Christ was not holding things together. And the only hope that things are going to get better is that Christ is holding things together.

DELIGHT IN THE LORD JESUS FOR ACCESS TO GOD. The last line of verse 21 is a doxology: “*to whom be glory forever and ever.*” Since it is through the Lord Jesus Christ that we have access to the power of God to reach your full potential, you ought to praise and worship and adore him. It would be a sad thing to wake up on Easter Sunday and not have a voice to cry out, “He is risen!” But it would be a far greater tragedy to wake up on Easter Sunday with a voice and have no desire to cry out, “He is risen!” The fact that the bloody cross and empty tomb of Jesus offers us a new a living way to God demands more than optional response. It demands our grateful praise to the one who has done for us what we cannot do for ourselves. And stubborn old lady kept resisting Charles Spurgeon’s attempt to witness to her about Christ. Not fully realizing what she was saying, she told him, “Ah, Mr. Spurgeon, if the Lord ever does save a person like me, he would never hear the end of it.” This ought to be your disposition. If the Lord has saved you, you should never let him hear the end of it. Psalm 107:2 says: “*Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble.*”

DOWN AT THE CROSS WHERE MY SAVIOR DIED
DOWN WHERE FROM CLEANING FROM SIN I CRIED
THERE TO MY HEART WAS THE BLOOD APPLIED
GLORY TO HIS NAME